

THE LOST DOG

BY MARY E. WILKINS

THE dog was speeding, nose to the ground; he had missed his master early in the morning; now it was late afternoon, but at last he thought he was on his track. He went like a wind, his ears pointed ahead, his slender legs seemingly flat against his body; he was eagerness expressed by a straight line

of impetuous motion. He had had nothing to eat all day; he was spent with anxiety and fatigue and hunger; but now, now, he believed he was on his master's track, and all that was forgotten.

But all at once he stopped, his tail dropped between his legs, and he skulked away from the false track in an agony

of mortification and despair. It had ended abruptly at a street corner, where the man had taken a carriage. He doubled and went back for his life to the last place where he had seen his master in the morning. It was a crowded corner, and the people were passing and repassing, weaving in and out, a great concourse of humanity following the wonderful maze of their own purposes.

The dog sniffed at the heels of one and another. He followed, and retreated; he dodged, and skulked. He was a thing of abject apology, and felt no resentment at a kick when he got in the way of that tide of human progress. The dog without his master was like modesty without raiment, like a body without a soul. Without his master he was not even a dog; he was a wandering intelligence only, and had fallen below his inheritance of dog wit.

He yelped now and then, but his yelp would have been unintelligible to another of his species. He put his nose to the ground; the confusion of scents and his despair made him, as it were, deaf in his special acuteness. He blindly ran after this one and that one. Now and then he heard a voice which made his heart leap, and was after the owner at a bound, but it was never his master.

The city lights were blazing out, and the raw night settling down; on the corner were two steady interweaving streams to the right and left of people going homeward, and all with the thought of shelter and food and fire and rest.

Finally the dog fastened his despairing eyes upon a man coming around the corner, and he followed him. He knew he was not his master, but there was that about him which awakened that wisdom of dependence which had come down to him through generations. He knew that here was a man who could love a dog.

So he followed him on and on, moving swiftly at heel, keeping well in shadow, his eyes fixed anxiously upon the man's back, ready to be off at the first symptom of his turning. But the man did not see him until he had reached his home, which was a mile beyond the city limits, quite in the country.

He went up to a solitary house set in a deep yard behind some fir-trees. There

were no lights in the windows. The man drew a key from his pocket and unlocked the door. Then he saw the dog.

He looked hard at the dog, and the dog looked piteously at him. The dog wagged his tail in frantic circles of conciliation. The full moon was up, and there was a street lamp, so the two could see each other quite distinctly. Both the dog and the man were thoroughbreds. The dog saw a man, young, in shabby clothes, which he wore like a gentleman, with a dark and clear-cut face. The man saw a dog in a splendid suit of tawny gold hair, with the completeness of his pure blood in every line and curve of his body. The man whistled; the dog pressed closer to him; his eyes upon his face were like a woman's. The man stopped and patted the dog on his tawny gold head, then entered the house, and whistled again, and the dog followed him in.

That evening the dog lay on an old skin rug before the hearth-fire, but uneasily, for his new master was doing something which disturbed him. He was singing with a magnificent tenor voice, and the dog was vaguely injured in his sensibilities by music. At first he howled, but when the man bade him be quiet, he protested no longer, except for an occasional uneasy roll of an eye or twitch of an ear at a new phrase.

The dog had had a good supper; he had eaten rather more than the man. There was plenty of wood on the hearth, though the reserve was not large. But the man who sang had the optimism of a brave soul which, when it is striving to its utmost, cannot face the image of defeat without a feeling of disgrace.

He was a great singer; he had been born to it, and he had worked for it. Some day the material fruits of it—the milk and honey of prosperity—would be his; in the mean time there was his voice and his piano; and while there was wood, let his hearth-fire blaze merrily; and while he had a crust, let him share it with a dog that was needy!

Now and then the man in the intervals of his singing patted the dog, and spoke to him caressingly; and the dog looked at him with a gratitude which reached immensity through its unspeakableness.

The dog wore no collar, and the man marvelled at that.



BOTH THE DOG AND THE MAN WERE THOROUGHBREDS

It was midnight when there came a step at the door and a ring, and the dog was on his feet with a volley of barks. He was ready to charge a whole army for the sake of this man whom he had known only a few hours. But in this case he would have attacked, not an enemy who threatened his master's safety, but a friend who brought him wealth and fame.

When the man returned to the room with the out-of-doors cold clinging to him, his face was radiant, jubilant. The tenor who had been singing in the opera-house had broken his engagement, and the manager had come for him.

He told the dog for lack of another companion, and the dog reared himself on two legs, like a man, in his ecstasy of joyful comradeship, and placed his paws on the man's shoulders and licked his young face. Then the man sat down at his piano, and sang over and over his part in the opera, and the dog gave only one low howl under his breath, then lay down on the skin rug, with twitching ears and back.

That night the man's golden age began, and the dog shared it. His new master had his share of superstition, and regarded the old saying that a dog following one brought luck, and had, beside his love for the animal, a species of gratitude and sense of obligation.

In the days of luxurious living which followed, the dog was to the front with the man. He rode with him in his softly cushioned carriage to the opera-house, and slept in his dressing-room while the music and the applause went on. Occasionally he would make a faint protesting howl when a loud strain reached his ears. The dog loved the man for love's sake alone; that which won the adulation of men was his trial. He loved him not for his genius but in spite of it.

The dog in this new life grew to his full possibility of beauty and strength. His coat shone like satin; he was a radiant outcome of appreciation and good food; but palmier days still were to come.

One day the tenor brought home a wife; then the dog for the first time knew what it was to be the pet of a woman. Then he wore a great bow of blue satin on his silver collar, and often his coat smelled of violets.

The new wife was adorable; the touch

of her little soft hands on the dog's head was ecstasy; and *she* did not sing, but talked to him, and praised him with such sweet flattery that he used to roll his eyes at her like a lover, and thrust an appealing paw upon her silken lap.

Then he grew to an appreciation of himself; all his abjectness vanished. He became sure of himself and of love. He was a happy dog, except for one thing. Always in his sleep he searched for his old lost master. He was never on the street but down went his nose to the ground for the scent of those old foot-steps.

And one day, when he had been with his new friends two years, he found him. His mistress's carriage was waiting, and he beside it, one day in spring when they were selling daffodils and violets on the street, and doves were murmuring around the church towers, and the sparrows clamorous, and everything which had life, in which hope was not quite dead, was flying, and darting, and blossoming, and creeping out into the sunlight.

Then the dog saw his old master coming down the street, scraping the pavement with his heavy feet—an old man, mean and meanly clad, with no grace of body or soul, unless it might have been the memory of, and regret for, the dog. Him he had loved after the best fashion which he knew. This splendid brute thing, with his unquestioning devotion, had kept alive in him his piteous remnant of respect for self, and had been to him more than any one of his own kind, who had put him to shame, and sunk him in the lowest depths of ignominy by forcing his realization of it.

The dog stood still, with ears erect and tail stiff, then was after his old master with a mighty bound. At first the man cursed and kicked at him, then looked again and swore 'twas his old dog, and stroked his head with that yellow clutch of avarice for his own possession and his own profit, rather than affection, which was the best his poor soul could compass.

But the dog followed him, faithful not only to his old master, but to a nobler thing, the faithfulness which was in himself—and maybe by so doing gained another level in the spiritual evolution of his race.